

# ALASKA TELEHEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

*"Promoting Telehealth  
Efforts in Alaska"*

## NEWSLETTER

*Issue 2  
February 2000*



### Fairbanks - Telehealth Issues and Meeting Invitation

by Facilitator Tom Nighswander, MD, MPH



On December 16, 1999, Facilitator Tom Nighswander traveled to Fairbanks with Karen Perdue, Commissioner for the State of Alaska, and Liz Connell, Health Policy Analyst with Senator Ted Stevens' office, to meet with hospital and telecommunications providers from this community. The group discussed Telehealth concerns in Fairbanks, and the current status of telemedicine initiatives from both the state and federal perspective.

The Fairbanks community has recently had an increase in their telecommunications capacity that will greatly enhance their ability to move forward with Telemedicine applications. Fairbanks Memorial Hospital hopes to establish electronic links within the local clinical community and in the surrounding catchment area. Dr. Richard Burger and Dr. Owen Hanley, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, are telemedicine champions for this community. Both have used several Telehealth applications to consult with outside specialists on patient care.

At the invitation of Fairbanks providers, the next Alaska Telehealth Advisory Council meeting will be held in Fairbanks on Friday, March 3, at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The goal for the March meeting is to become more familiar with Interior Telehealth issues, review progress made by the various workgroups and pilot project work products, and make financial commitments for pilot projects not yet approved by the Council. In addition, Leigh Thurston from Fairbanks Memorial Hospital will present an overview of this community's interest and current plans for Telemedicine.

### Hear Ye, Hear Ye



*Do you have an article, concern, or event you would like included in the next newsletter? If so, e-mail to:*

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

- The **Clinical Providers Workgroup** meets on the second and fourth Thursday of each month at 12:45 p.m.
- The **Reimbursement Workgroup** meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 9:30 a.m.
- The **Technical Standards Workgroup** meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 1 p.m.
- The **Telepsychiatry Workgroup** meets on the first and third Thursday of each month at 12:30 p.m.

For any questions or comments, please contact:

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# ALASKA TELEHEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Workgroup Updates

### CHAIRS

Commissioner Karen Perdue  
Richard Mandsager, MD

### WORKGROUP MEMBERSHIP

#### Clinical Providers:

Jerome List, MD, Alaska State Medical Association, 261-3096  
Leslie Bryant, MD, 261-3162  
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Richard Burger, MD, Frbks, 452-6610  
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#### Reimbursement:

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Kathe Boucha, Providence Health Systems, 261-4955  
Marijo Toner, Bartlett Memorial Hospital, 586-8488  
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#### Technical:

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Terry Daniels, Consultant, 230-3475  
Kathy Fanning, Technology Management Service, 257-5426  
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Steven Menzies, DOD, 580-3094  
Leigh Thurston, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, 458-5465  
Marijo Toner, Bartlett Memorial Hospital, 586-8488

#### Telepsychiatry:

Comm. Karen Perdue, SOA, 465-3030  
Jeff Jesse, Alaska Mental Health Trust, 269-7963  
Vern Stillner, MD, Bartlett Outpatient Services, 586-8498  
William Worrall, MD, Department of Corrections, 269-7319  
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Roger Schaeffer, MD, 257-4857  
John Battaglia, MD, API, 269-7100  
Jay Collier, MD, ANMC, 729-2500  
Mike Terry, CHP, AFHCAN, 729-2263  
Karl Brimmer, MD

### WORKGROUP and PILOT PROJECTS

#### **Non-Federal Sites Survey - Pilot Project**

Terry Daniels of Daniels, Tschannen & Associates has been contracted to conduct an in-state survey of non-federal health care providers to determine the existing information infrastructure as related to the development of Telemedicine applications. An initial mail-out to 25 clinics and community hospitals was conducted the beginning of January. A request from the January 7 Council meeting resulted in the survey being expanded to include rural providers and community mental health centers, with an additional 100 surveys mailed mid-January. Currently, many of the mental health centers within the state do not have on-site psychiatry support. The Telepsychiatry application could prove very useful to this field when combined with on-site visits. A status report will be presented at the March 3 meeting.

#### **Technical Standards Workgroup**

The Technical Standards Workgroup will present final recommendations at the March 3 meeting. Much thought and flexibility has gone into the Technical Standards development, with exemplary cooperation from both Alaska's public and private sectors. The workgroup recognizes the "living document" nature of these recommendations. They will need periodic revisiting as technology changes. The workgroup expects the draft final recommendations to be widely distributed for additional comments and suggestions for improvement.

#### **Reimbursement Workgroup - Pilot Projects**

A scope of work has been prepared for providing consultation to the Alaska Medicaid office to review the policy and regulatory changes necessary for reimbursement of Telemedicine in Alaska. The scope of work developed by the workgroup will be converted to a Request for Proposal (RFP) and will be issued by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's (ANTHC) Procurement & Contracting Department. The RFP should be announced by the March Council meeting.

A Reimbursement pilot scope of work is currently being developed in detail and will be reviewed at the March meeting. In such a small state as Alaska, many of the best people available to develop project ideas often are the same ones who could successfully execute the work. This is especially true with this project. Now that the project's conceptual framework has been completed, and to avoid conflict of interest, potential bidders participating in the initial development have been requested to take a leave of absence until the bidding process has been completed. It is anticipated that the RFP will be announced after the March 3 meeting.

#### **Telepsychiatry Workgroup - Pilot Project**

Current work efforts by the Telepsychiatry workgroup members include developing Telepsychiatry guidelines in Alaska focused on what is medically necessary for timely access to care, availability of on-site services, type of service being sought, and quality of equipment and connectivity.

A low-bandwidth Telepsychiatry project RFP, modeled from the work Dr. Bill Worrall has done with the Department of Corrections, should be announced before March 3, and will be directed to in-state rural community mental health centers. The project focus will promote the use of weekly Telepsychiatry sessions as a means to improve access and quality of care at rural mental health centers. It is anticipated that this will be a year-long project, with ongoing evaluation as an integral part of the project. The proposal is being sponsored jointly by the Council and the Alaska Mental Health Trust.